

THE WHITE FISH OF LAKE MICHIGAN

Large Sums Invested in the Business of Catching and Marketing Them.

FAMILIAR APPLIANCES USED

Gill Nets and Pound Nets Same as on Columbia River, But the Industry Smaller by Comparison.

Chicago Times-Herald.

Through all the northern waters of Lake Michigan just now the trout are running. In schools, in shoals, in swarms these silver-sided wanderers are flashing to the feeding grounds. It is the time of their semi-annual migration. Only twice a year do they give the fishermen a chance to make a close acquaintance with them. In the early spring they come suddenly into human ken, remain six weeks and disappear. On or about September 1 they return once more to shallow waters and net ridden reaches. Where they go in the meantime, where they live and how they live the man is not alive who can say. Old fishermen, who have spent the best years of their lives along the stormy coasts of the lake, profess to believe that the trout and the white fish go through the lake system and into the St. Lawrence and thence into the sea. It is a certainty that they disappear apparently from all of the lakes at some seasons. They, of course, do not put to sea. They are fresh water fishes. The most reasonable hypothesis is that they retire to the center of the lake, where the water is deepest and least disturbed, and there think for months at a stretch.

The food fishes of Lake Michigan are not of numerous species. They are the whitefish, the trout, the sturgeon, the perch and the herring. Sturgeon are rare. So, comparatively, is the herring. The whitefish and trout are in acres. There are no bass, no muskellunge, no pike, no pickerel. There is reason to believe that all of these fishes once existed in the lake waters, but they disappeared. Probably they were all caught. It seems impossible that they should be exterminated by man, but there is no explanation for it. Fish depopulation happens more frequently than is generally known. Old Chicagoans can remember that when they used to go to South Chicago, then known as Calumet, and catch a wagon load of whitefish whenever they wished. They are not very old men at that. It is probable that not a whitefish has been caught of Chicago in the last five years. They were very infrequent ten years ago. That which is locally true of the whitefish is true also, in lesser degree, of the trout. Occasionally they are taken hereabouts, but it does not occur often. They used to be plentiful. About the only lake fish which is left to the Chicago man is the perch. This sport flourishes. Whoever wanders along the city's lake front and sees the fishermen raising their circular nets may know that they are after perch. There is nothing else for them except minnows, which are used only for perch bait.

There are in the city, however, 200 men who derive their subsistence wholly from catching perch. They do very well at it while it lasts, but the season is short. The perch also comes in the spring and goes away and comes in the fall for a while, and once more disappears. It has been ascertained beyond doubt, goes to the deeper and untroubled waters of the central lake. He lies prone under the ice all of the winter through, deep down where not a sign of the howling winter wind can reach him, but how he lives is another matter. There is nothing out there which he can catch. In fact, all of the other finny denizens of that part of the unsalted sea are bigger than he, and they dine on him merrily.

The Chicago perch fisher uses a gill net. A gill net is six feet wide and 150 feet long. From one side it depends lines to which are attached heavy weights. That is the bottom side. From the top side come lines to which large floats are attached. When the gill net is set the weights rest upon the bottom and the floats on the surface. It stands up about 21 feet under the surface, like a fence. The shoals of perch strike it in their quest for food. The meshes are large enough to let the little ones pass through. Those worth taking can get their heads through and that is all. They attempt to draw back and the thread of the mesh slips under the gill. There they are. Struggles are useless, and in fact, they struggle very little. They just remain quietly and resignedly stationary, anchored by the gill, until the man who owns the net comes out in a little boat, lifts it and removes them by hand, tossing them into the bottom of his craft, where they flounder until they can flounder no more. When he reaches land he will set about cleaning them, and the expertness he develops is nothing short of wonderful. It is his business to remove not only the entrails from the perch, but the scales also. August Woelke, a squat German, who has been a Chicago fisherman for twenty years, has his gill nets set from

four to ten miles out from the foot of Eighty-third street. He cleans, when not in a hurry, seventy pounds of perch an hour, and will back himself to clean eighty pounds for money. The insides of August's hands are a fine network of scars and new gashes.

There are three main fishing points where the dwellers in Lake Michigan are captured. They are Petoskey, St. James and Manistique. St. James is known sometimes as Beaver Island, and here there is a fishing colony of 400 men, with their wives and children. At these places trout and whitefish and some sturgeon are taken. Nobody pays any attention to perch. Gill nets are used and, in the shallow waters, pound nets. The pound net takes its name from the enclosures in cities wherein stray animals are confined. It is a circular net with openings at the bottom through which the fish enter. Once in, they cannot find their way out and are lifted in masses and unresisting. This industry is one of the most thriving and valuable in the northwest. In its effect upon the health and well being of the people at large it is one of the most important. Thousands upon thousands of dollars are invested and the annual take is something enormous. It runs far into the thousands of tons in weight and into the hundreds and thousands in value. Invested at the three points mentioned is more than \$250,000. It has been put into miles of nets, into steamers, into tugs, into sailing boats, into donkey engines, ice tanks, refrigerator cars and kindred things. The total population deriving a living from the white fish and trout industries is more than five thousand.

More picturesque places are not to be found in this country. Each morning three small steamers leave Petoskey for visits to the gill nets, which have not been lifted since the day before. In each one is a donkey engine, whose power is used to lift the nets. Their weight when loaded with fish is beyond the strength of the men aboard. Quarter-mile after quarter-mile of the mesh is lifted from a great depth, and it comes to the surface showing silvery with the fish. It looks like an endless and broad ribbon of a metallic luster, and when the morning sun strikes it is a singularly beautiful thing. The fish from the gill net are all removed by hand, and it is a tedious as well as painful process, but the pound net is simply lifted to the surface and its captives are scooped up in large wooden shovels. Near the bow of each of these boats is a large compartment holding ice, and the fish are thrown into it in a stream. It is the object to chill them through at once, and by the time the steamer reaches shore they are dead and cold. They are disembowled, but are not cleaned otherwise. Many a housewife has wished that the company would remove the scales, but that would be too much trouble for the company. Also, to some extent, it would detract from the aggregate weight. The man who buys a whitefish pays for the scales, just as a man who buys a roast pays for the bone. When the fish have been drawn they are placed into large square boxes, ice-packed, which are termed "caris." These cars in turn are put into the cars, and so they are hauled to Chicago. This city takes nearly all the Lake Michigan catch. Milwaukee used to be a large fish market but it has declined of late years. The fishermen of the upper lake waters are reasonably well paid. Many of them work for the Booth company, and have no capital invested. Boats, nets and other accessories are furnished to them. Others own sail boats and nets and simply sell their product direct to the company.

The take of fish from Lake Michigan and from the other bodies of water connected with it has been so enormous, and so long continued that there was at one time grave danger that both the whitefish and the trout would be exterminated. Some years ago, however, the national government came to the rescue and now the national hatcheries are doing everything possible to keep up the supply. The lake fish hatcheries are placed at Cape Vincent, N. Y., Put-in-Bay, Ohio, Alpena and Northville, Mich., and Duluth, Minn. At Northville 4,000,000 trout are hatched each year. Last year more than 95,000,000 of whitefish fry were hatched by the commission and liberated in suitable waters. The enormous increase in the number of the whitefish thus attained may be appreciated when it is said that of these liberated fry by far the larger part will reach maturity. The hatching of whitefish eggs long ago progressed from the experimental stage. It is now exact. The commissioners are much more successful in hatching than are the unaided fish themselves. Under natural conditions only a very small percentage of the eggs hatch. Through artificial propagation from 75 to 95 per cent are productive. The microscope is a great aid to the fish culturist, enabling him to determine the exact percentage of dead eggs, and in many instances, the cause of the failure. In order to provide against the uncertainty of the seasons and to insure a sufficient supply of spawning fish, it has been the custom of the commissioners to capture and pen numbers of healthy fish in season and keep them until they have spawned. They are penned in large crates through which the water flows freely. The eggs are hatched in specially made jars, kept at a uniformly proper temperature.

Chicagoans do not know it, but every Friday they devour tens of thousands of whitefish and trout bred by their paternal Uncle Samuel. The whitefish of Lake Michigan reaches a larger size than any other species of white fish in the United States. Examples weighing more than twenty pounds have



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been taken, though the average weight is under four pounds. They will begin to move in to the shores of the lake about the middle of next month in search of spawning grounds. They will disappear into deep water about December. The slaughter of them will be, as it is always, tremendous. Gill nets will be set for them in what are known as "gangs," that is, a cluster of many nets, making escape practically impossible if the fish invade the waters infested by the nets. The average "take" of a gang in November is 1,000 pounds.

McKINLEY IN THE WEST.

Chicago Times-Herald.

President McKinley's reception in the West is the grandest proof we have had of the utter futility of the "anti-imperialist" propaganda. There is practically no sympathy in the great Mississippi valley region for the shameful policy of retreat. The West is for progress and expansion. It abounds in a perfect faith in American institutions and aims, in persistent optimism, in energy, self-reliance and courage. Moreover, its hopes will be fulfilled and the government will be sustained. Against its tremendous vigor and enthusiasm, its exultant national spirit, poor doubting theorists and pettifoggers will be as powerless as a withered leaf in an autumn gale.

The president is not now upon a partisan tour, and everywhere his eager listeners expect some word from him on a policy that is held to be not partisan but patriotic. They would be intensely disappointed if he did not at least hint at the Philippine question. They see no transgression of the rules of propriety in that, but on the contrary something that is eminently proper. Why should not the chief executive of the nation speak for the nation and against the rebels? As well demand that he should forswear his right to personify the national sentiment during a foreign war. In the one case, as in the other, it is not only his right but his duty to proclaim the essential unity of the country to the world.

That the people recognize this fact is shown conclusively by the nature of the demonstrations wherever he stopped. The climax of enthusiasm has always been reached when he has made some reference to our responsibilities

and our mission under the flag. It is such expressions as the following that have been the most loudly applauded: "I like this monument. I like this symbol that I face today—the defense of the flag. That is what we do whenever and wherever that flag is assailed. And with us war always sleeps when the assailants of our flag consent to Grant's terms of unconditional surrender."

"Our flag, wherever it floats, does not change in character. It is the same under a tropical sun as it is in your own United States. It represents wherever its standard is raised liberty and advancement for the people."

There are responsibilities, born of duty, that can never be repudiated. Duty unperformed is dishonor, and dishonor brings shame, which is heavier to carry than any burden which honor impose."

It needed no interpreter to explain the allusions. As clearly as if they had adopted formal resolutions the responsive auditors announce their approval of the words of the administration's course. They caused it to be known far and wide that they were for the suppression of insurrection, for a fulfillment of a duty to civilization, for the sovereignty of their country in every land where that sovereignty has been asserted.

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